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PATENT 6,764,598 B2

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

In re:	Yu et al.)	Docket No.:	06-0320-FSI.RA
)		
Patent No.:	6,764,598 B2)	Examiner:	Menon, Krishnan S
)		
Issued:	July 20, 2004)	Group Art:	1723
)		
Appl. No.:	10/034,507)		

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For: **METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR SEPARATING EMULSIFIED WATER FROM FUEL**

PETITION TO ACCEPT LATE PAYMENT OF MAINTENANCE FEE PUSUANT TO 37 C.F.R. 1.378(c)

September 11, 2008

Mail Stop Petition
Commissioner for Patents
P.O. Box 1450
Alexandria, VA 22313-1450

Dear Sir:

Patentee respectfully petitions the Commissioner to accept late payment of the maintenance fee for United States Patent No. 6,764,598 B2. A revocation of power of attorney new power of attorney and change of correspondence form is appended hereto.

U.S. Patent No. 6,764,598 B2 expired for failure to pay maintenance fees on July 20, 2008.

Please find enclosed herewith the required maintenance fee of \$465.00 pursuant to 37 C.F.R. 1.20 (e), along with a surcharge fee in the amount of \$1,640.00 pursuant to 37 C.F.R. 1.20 (i)(2). Patentee claims small entity status.

The entire delay in payment of the maintenance fee was unintentional.

Copies of the patent and bibliographical maintenance fee windows are appended hereto.

CONCLUSION

Applicant respectfully requests acceptance by the Director of the United States Patent & Trademark Office of the late maintenance fee tendered hereunder.

Respectfully submitted,

Dated: September 11, 2008



Thomas R. Williamson III
Attorney for Applicant
Reg. No. 47,180

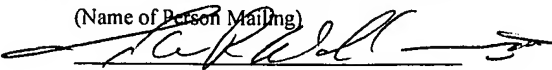
Williamson Intellectual Property Law, LLC
1870 The Exchange, Suite 100
Atlanta, GA 30339
770-777-0977

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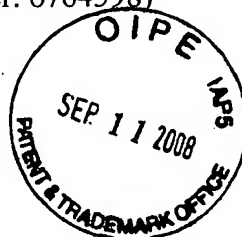
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(Name of Person Mailing)


(Signature of Person Mailing)

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Fee Code:					
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US006764598B2

(12) **United States Patent**
Yu et al.

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 6,764,598 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent:** **Jul. 20, 2004**

(54) **METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR
SEPARATING EMULSIFIED WATER FROM
FUEL**

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(US)

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Hackettstown, NJ (US)

(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this
patent is extended or adjusted under 35
U.S.C. 154(b) by 150 days.

(21) Appl. No.: **10/034,507**

(22) Filed: **Dec. 28, 2001**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2003/0121858 A1 Jul. 3, 2003

(51) Int. Cl.⁷ **C02F 9/00**

(52) U.S. Cl. **210/195.2; 210/251; 210/257.2;**
210/261; 210/295; 210/314; 210/321.64

(58) **Field of Search** **210/654, 194,**
210/251, 799, 295, 296, 314, 316, 489,
492, 300, 503, 505, 323.2, 416.4, 195.1,
321.64, 323.1, 257.2, 261, DIG. 5, 195.2,
321.82, 488; 428/272, 421, 422

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U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

4,372,847 A 2/1983 Lewis

4,814,087 A 3/1989 Taylor
4,846,976 A 7/1989 Ford
4,978,454 A * 12/1990 Sweet 210/640
5,149,433 A 9/1992 Lien
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* cited by examiner

Primary Examiner—W. L. Walker

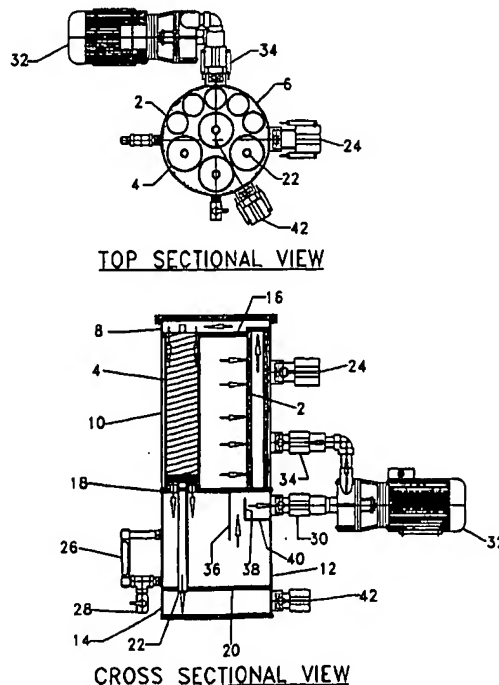
Assistant Examiner—Krishnan S. Menon

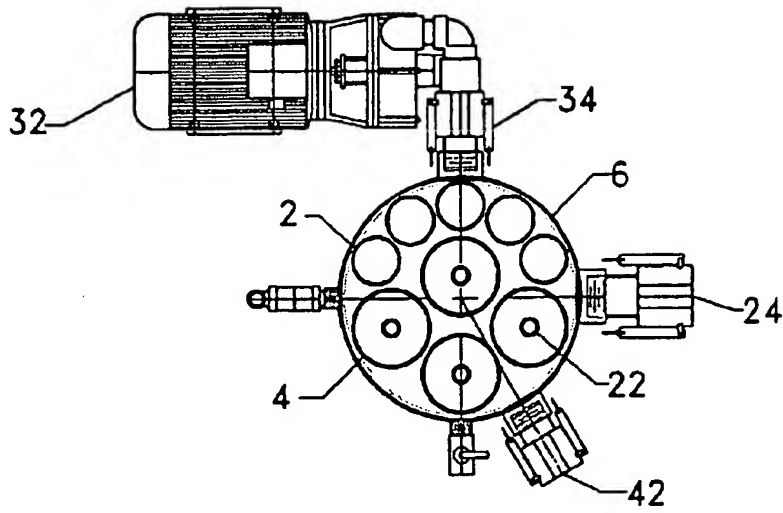
(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm*—Myers & Kaplan, LLC;
Thomas Williamson, III

(57) **ABSTRACT**

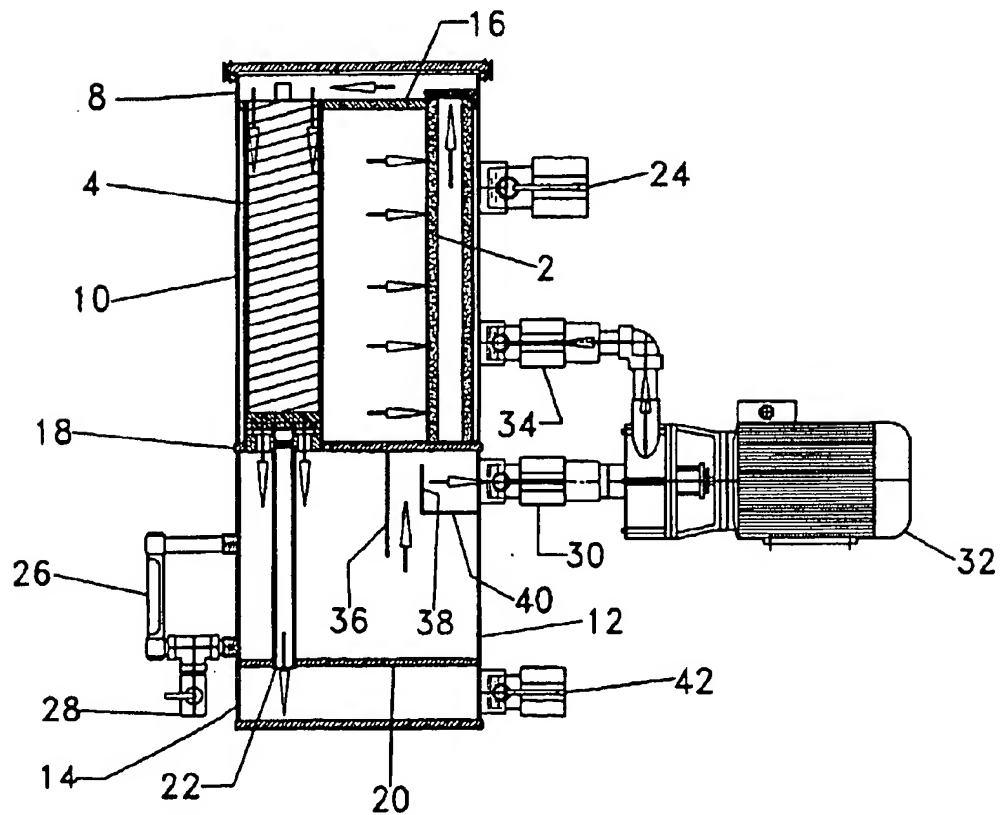
The invention discloses an apparatus for filtration of water from hydrocarbons comprised of a fresh-feed inlet, a first dead end filter, having a filter medium that is hydrophobic, a second cross-flow filter, having a membrane that is hydrophobic, a common housing to contain both the first and second filters, a system for the recirculation of the retentate, a chamber for water settling, and an outlet for clean fuel permeate. This invention takes advantage of the properties of the functional groups of a surfactant, by using the surfactant to allow a hydrophobic medium to attract water, attach the water molecules to the hydrophobic medium, and then allow for agglomeration of the water molecules, which finally become large enough to detach and be swept away by the cross-flow. The hydrocarbon may then pass through the second membrane filter uncontaminated by water and be used as clean fuel. This invention can thus be used to remove high concentrations of water, up to 5%, in hydrocarbons, while allowing a high flow rate by preventing blockage of the final filter by water.

7 Claims, 6 Drawing Sheets





TOP SECTIONAL VIEW



CROSS SECTIONAL VIEW

FIG. 1

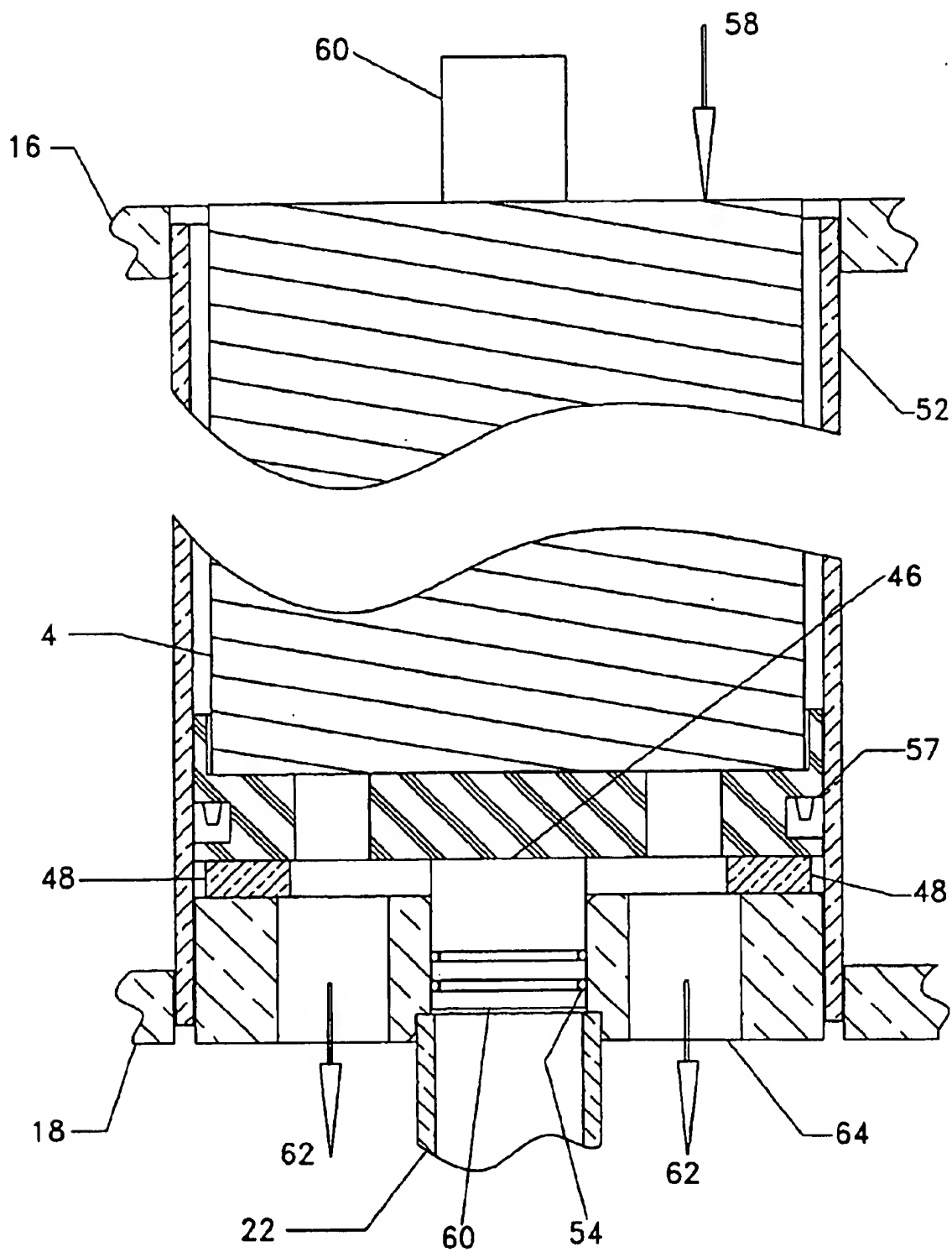


FIG. 2A

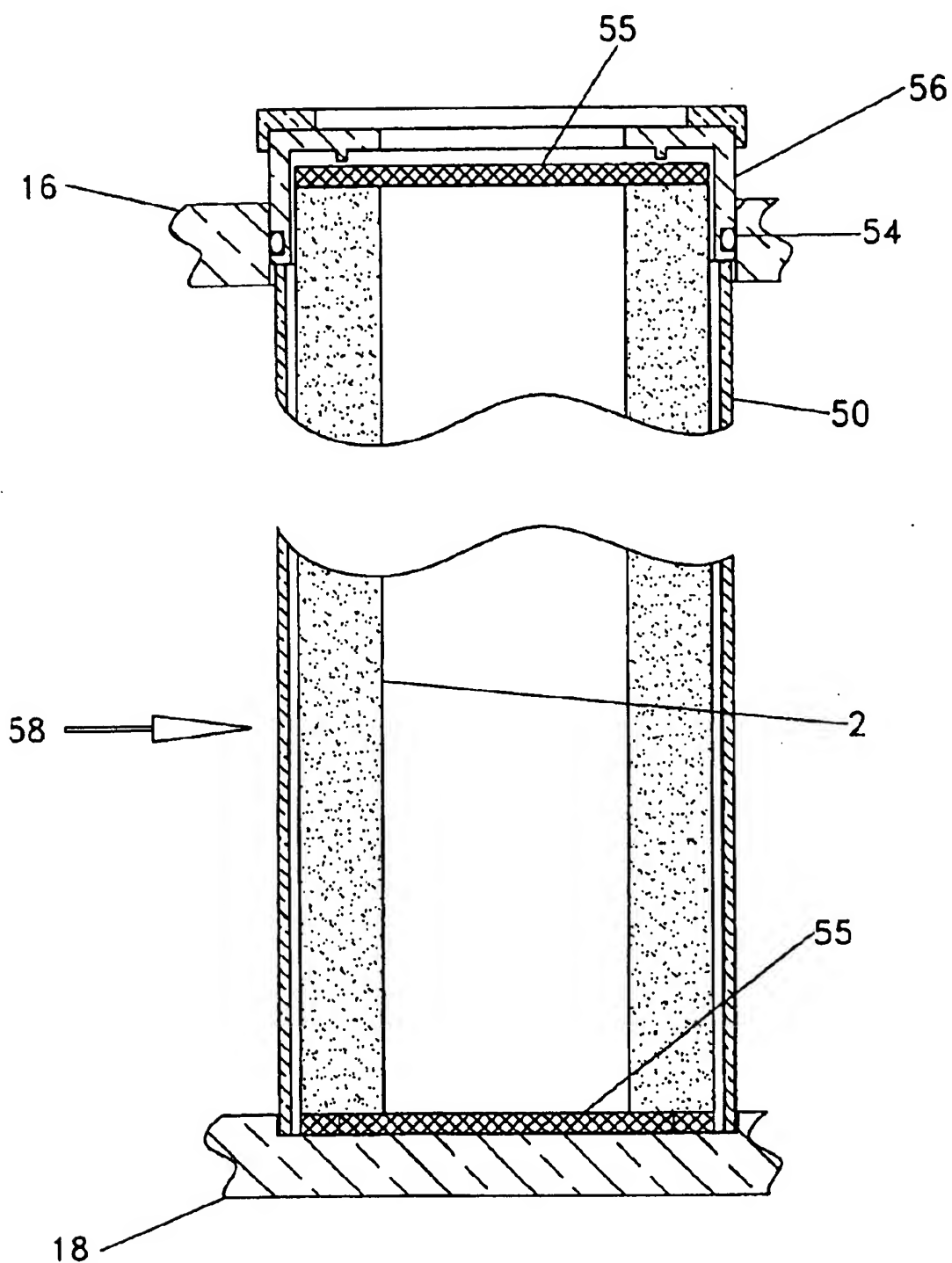


FIG. 2B

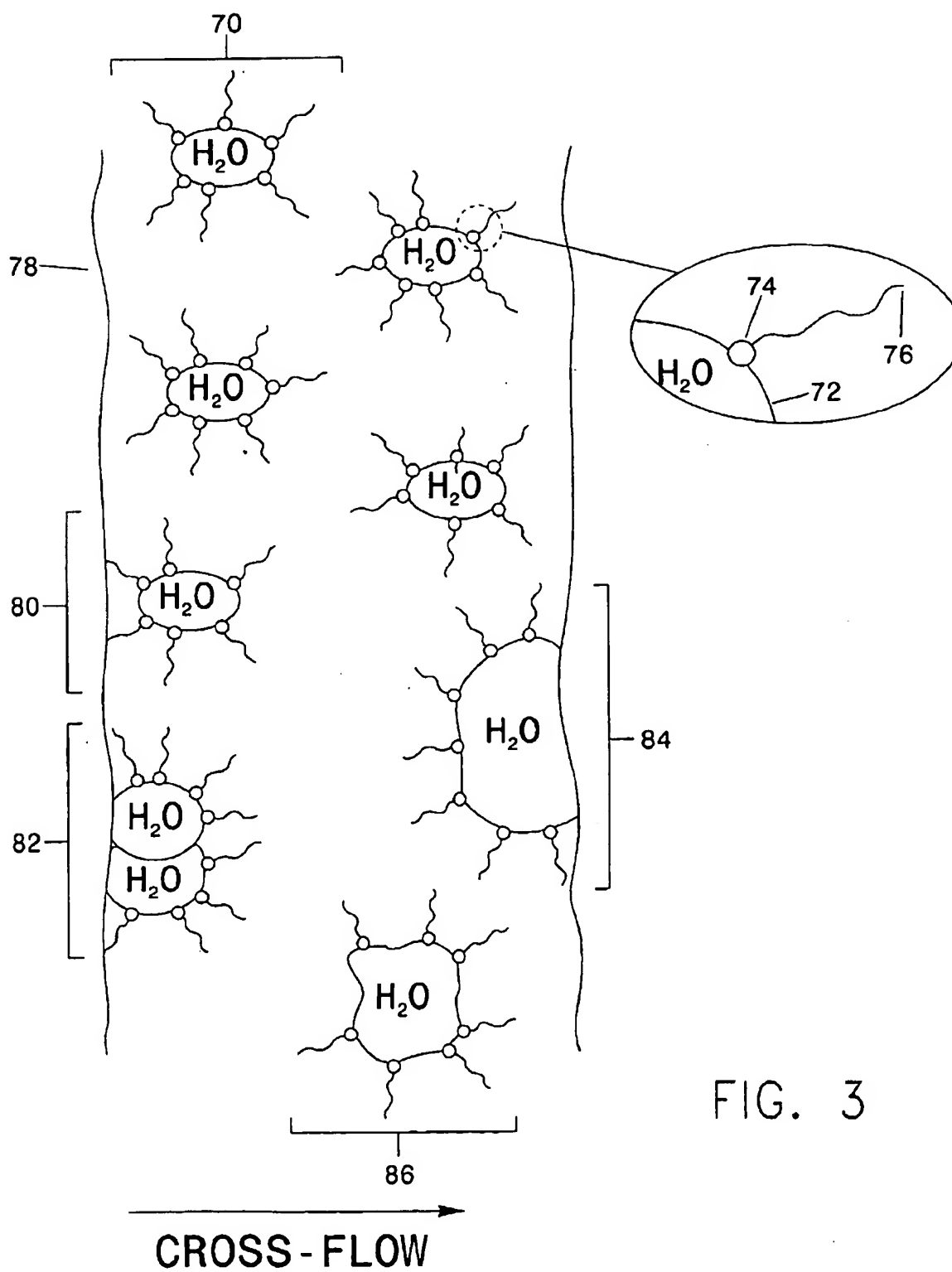


FIG. 3

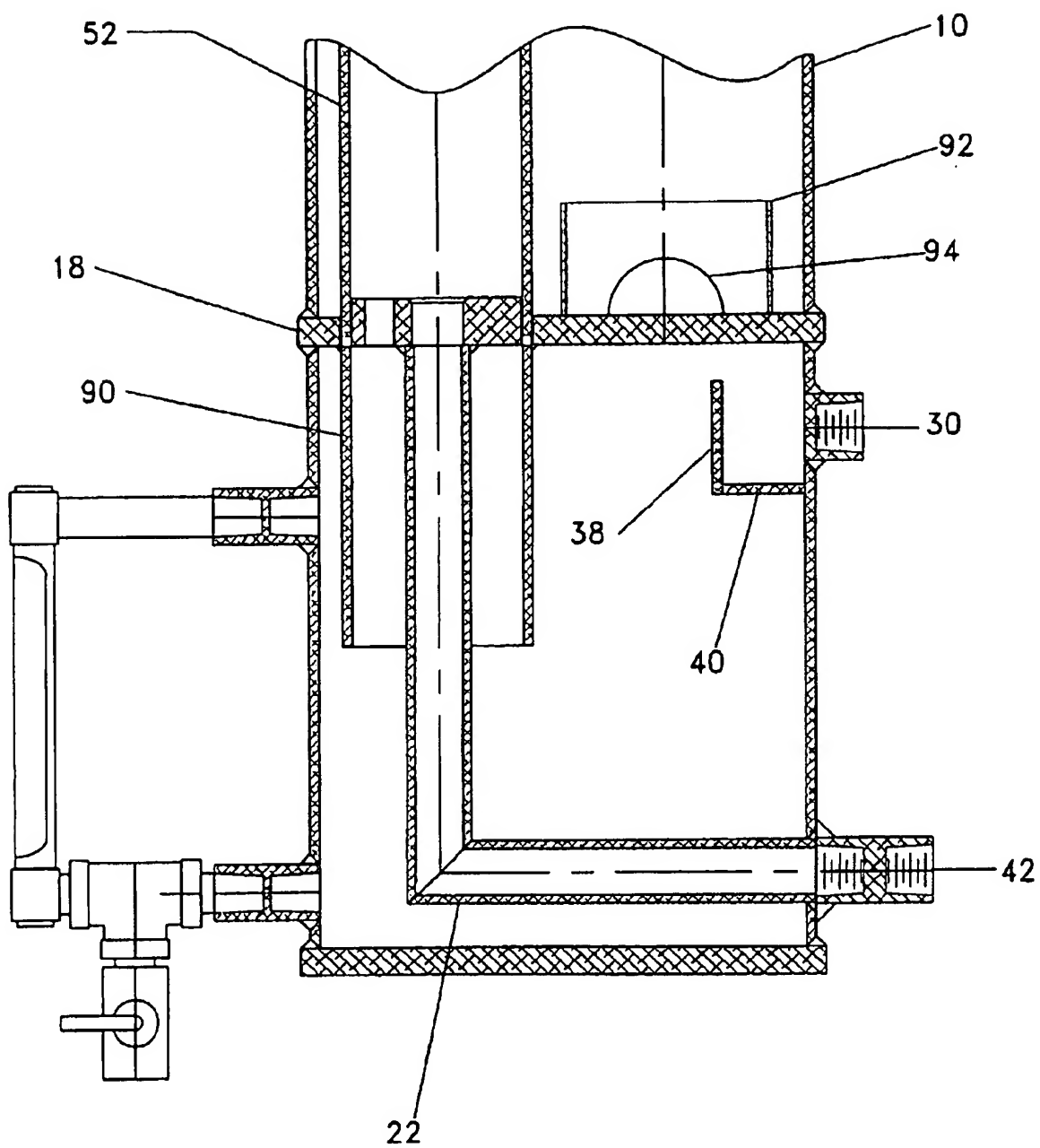


FIG. 4

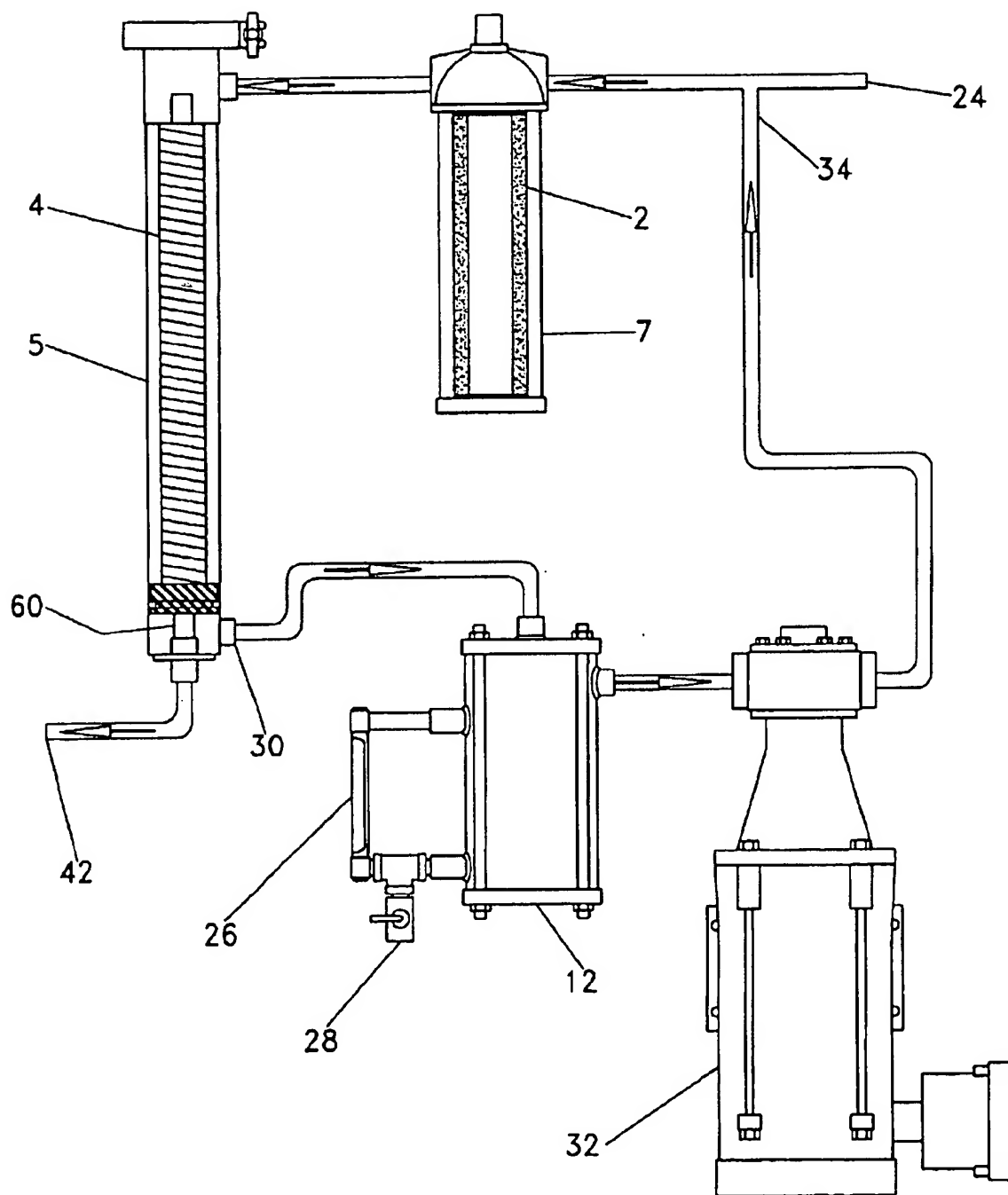


FIG. 5

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METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR SEPARATING EMULSIFIED WATER FROM FUEL

FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH

This application arose out of work under Contract #DAAE07-010-C-L023, Jan. 31, 2001, entitled "A Compact Self-cleaning Surfactant Resistant Fuel Filter", DoD SBIR A99-089, Sponsored by U.S. Army TACOM

CROSS-REFERENCES TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

Not Applicable

SEQUENCE LISTING, TABLE OR COMPUTER PROGRAM

Not Applicable

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to filtration to remove emulsified water from various types of liquid hydrocarbons, such as fuels and other solvents, where the emulsification is accomplished through the use of surfactants.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

When water is present in a fuel or other solvent, the preferred method of removal is through the use of a hydrophobic filter screen that prevents the passage of water. Such a screen can become covered with water, and the covering prevents the passage of fuel through the filter. Water may then be removed by backflushing or sweeping the surface with a flow to carry away the trapped water. However, the need for backflushing imparts an additional function that suspends the action of the filter for a period of time.

Other methods have used hydrophobic prefilters, but these suffer from the same need to backflush or sweep with a flow to remove the water on the filter surface.

In order to obviate the need to backflush, hydrophilic filters are often chosen for the first filter in a system. The hydrophilic filter will allow the passage of water into its interior, where the particles are absorbed onto the filter medium surface and there they coalesce into larger globules of water. These then eventually break free and pass into the gap separating the first filter from the second filter. There a stream of fuel carries away the water that has passed the first filter. However, when the fuel being filtered contains an emulsifying agent, the particles of water will remain suspended and pass through the first filter without coalescing, and continue on to the second filter. The emulsified water will then pass through this last filter under pressure, and continue to contaminate the fuel.

In this typical construction of the prior art used to remove water from jet fuel, a conventional fuel-water separator is usually comprised of two different filter cartridges. The two cartridges are arranged in series. The first is a water-coalescing cartridge, and the second is a water-separating cartridge. This latter cartridge is hydrophobic and operates to exclude water as described. Fuel contaminated with water passes through the coalescing filter cartridge first, which has a pore size range of 1 μm to 100 μm , preferably in the range

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of 1 μm to 20 μm . The coalescing cartridge usually has a pleated design or a string wound design utilizing hydrophilic material, such as cotton. Fine water droplets are absorbed by the filter fibers due to their hydrophilic surface property. As more and more water is absorbed in the filter cartridge, agglomeration occurs and larger water globules (greater than 100 \times 100 mesh typically used) are formed. The jet fuel flowing through this first cartridge then carries these away. Then the jet fuel containing water globules flows into the separation cartridge, which is made from 100 \times 100 mesh PTFE screen. In the prior art, the mesh size must be this large to prevent the buildup of water on the surface, which will occur with smaller mesh sizes. The jet fuel freely passes through the screen, but, due to its hydrophobic surface property, the PTFE screen retains the water globules and prevents their passage. The retained water globules then settle down to the bottom of the water collection chamber.

Surfactant fuel additives are often added to jet fuel for the purpose of cleaning the aircraft fuel system and allowing the engine components to operate more effectively and efficiently at higher temperatures. One particularly useful additive is SPEC-AID 8Q462, as sold by BetzDearborn In., Trevose, Pa., which is known as a +100 additive because it allows engine operation temperature to be increased by up to 100 degrees Fahrenheit. However, the side effect of surfactant fuel additives is that they break down the water droplets to much smaller sizes (1 μm to 10 μm), forming a stable water emulsion in the jet fuel. Each water droplet is surrounded by surfactant, the molecules of which consist of a hydrophilic head functional group (hydrophilic head) and a hydrophobic tail functional group (hydrophobic tail). The hydrophilic heads of the surfactant molecules attach to the water droplet and the hydrophobic tails face outward, where they are solvated by the jet fuel and form a stable emulsion. Very small droplets of water bound by surfactant thus characterize this emulsion. Since the surfactant-coated water droplets are thus hydrophobic at their surface, they will not be absorbed in the hydrophilic coalescing filter cartridge of the prior art. Therefore, there will be no water coalescing effect in the coalescing filters. Consequently, the jet fuel and the fine surfactant-bound water droplets freely pass through the first filter without coagulation, remain dispersed in the flow stream and reach the PTFE screen filter cartridge, where, due to the much larger pore size of the screen, they pass through and continue to contaminate the fuel.

In the instant invention, the filter medium is chosen to be hydrophobic in contrast to the accepted prior art. However, since the water molecules are bound with surfactant, and are now functionally hydrophobic, the water is not repelled by the hydrophobic filter medium, and passes into the filter. Because the tail of the surfactant molecule is hydrophobic, it is attracted to the surface of the hydrophobic filter medium. At the surface of the hydrophobic filter, the surfactant-bound water attaches and waits until a larger build-up occurs. As the surfactant-bound water molecules pass into and build up on the surface of the hydrophobic filter, the water agglomerates, breaking the boundary of the surfactant. The coagulated water then passes out of the filter into the stream between the first and second filter.

Similar to the conventional fuel-water separator, the instant invention is also comprised of two filter cartridges: A

water coagulation cartridge and a hydrophobic water separation cartridge. But here the similarity ends. The water coagulation cartridge of the instant invention is a hydrophobic depth filter cartridge. The filter medium can be nylon, polyester, polyvinylidene difluoride or polypropylene. As discussed above, the surfactant-coated water droplets have a hydrophobic surface when surfactant fuel additives are present in the jet fuel. As the jet fuel and the now "hydrophobic water droplets" flow through the hydrophobic filter cartridge, the "hydrophobic water droplets" attempt to be absorbed by the hydrophobic filter fibers and become contained within the filter. As more water droplets are absorbed in the cartridge, multi-layer water/additive globules are formed and, when they become large enough, are carried away by the jet fuel flow. A globule of water/additive is comprised of multiple water droplets. Its size is usually 5 to 10 times larger than that of a single emulsified water droplet, which would typically be in the range of 1 μm to 10 μm . This action within the filter greatly reduces the degree of water emulsification in the jet fuel. However, the globules are still in the range of micron sizes and don't settle down easily. The second function of the water coagulation filter is to separate dirt, bacteria, and other suspended solids from the jet fuel.

Next the jet fuel and water/additive globules flow to the water separation filter cartridge, which is formed with a hydrophobic membrane (e.g., PTFE) of 0.1 μm pore size, which is approximately three orders of magnitude smaller than used in prior art technology. Use of a filter with such a small pore size with the technology taught in the prior art will result in rapid blocking of the filter surface by water and shut down of the fuel flow. A bypass-flow or cross-flow is maintained on the membrane surface at the feed side. The cross-flow is used to sweep the membrane surface with high shear motion and to carry the suspension away from the filter surface, while the fuel component of the liquid (e.g., jet fuel) penetrates into the membrane pores under pressure. Examples of cross-flow designs include spiral wound module cartridges, tubular cartridges, and hollow fiber cartridges. The desirable flow ratio of cross-flow rate to the fresh-feed rate is 1:1 to 1:30 by volume.

When jet fuel has surfactant added to it, three things are needed to successfully separate water from jet fuel with surfactants, particularly when used with surfactants known as "+100 additive". These are

- 1) hydrophobic membrane
- 2) sub micron pore size (e.g., 0.1 μm), and
- 3) cross-flow.

Theoretically, hydrophilic membranes can be used for the separation filter in this type of application. However, water droplets are not always completely coated with the hydrophobic substance (additive). Therefore, uncoated water droplets can freely pass through the pores of a hydrophilic membrane. Using a hydrophobic membrane ensures that the uncoated water droplets cannot go through its pores. Since the surface energy of the coated water droplets is similar to jet fuel, the coated water droplet and jet fuel should have similar wettability on the hydrophobic membrane surface. In this case, separation is only controlled by the given pore size of the hydrophobic membrane. The membrane rejects any suspended particle with greater size than the membrane pores. Studies by the inventor have shown that a 0.1 μm

PTFE membrane gives desirable water rejection rate and permeate flow rate. Due to the hydrophobic property of the coated water droplets, they favor remaining on the hydrophobic membrane surface. If a water boundary layer is formed on the membrane surface, a certain amount of water will bleed through the membrane under pressure. To solve this problem, a cross-flow of fuel is formed on the membrane surface to sweep away the water droplets. With a 0.1 μm PTFE membrane, it is important to maintain a differential pressure that does not exceed 50 psi between the feed solution and the permeate, in order to prevent bleed through of water at the membrane filter. The inventor has also found that the temperature should not exceed 130 degrees Fahrenheit in order to prevent water from vaporizing, passing through both filters and then condensing in the clean fuel.

After exiting the water separation cartridge, the cross-flow stream (or concentrate) carries the concentrated emulsified water droplets and then enters a water-settling chamber. In this chamber, a relatively quiet environment is maintained. Fine water droplets agglomerate and form a heavier phase within the chamber. As more water droplets agglomerate in the heavier phase, water emulsion breakdown occurs, and free water is formed at the bottom of the water-settling chamber.

The water separation filter cartridge (PTFE membrane cartridge) works well by itself without the coagulation filter cartridge, if the water concentration is below 0.5% in the feed. However, the permeate flow rate can significantly drop if the water concentration is higher than 1% because the water forms a layer that blocks the surface of the filter. To make a fuel filter commercially practical, it must pass a test with a 3% water concentration in jet fuel and a permeate flow flux of at least 0.5 gallon/min./sq.-ft. of membrane area. The hydrophobic coagulation filter cartridge is a critical component to ensure adequate permeate flow rate with 3% water concentration in the feed. If no prefilter is present, there is a buildup of water that blocks further fuel from passing through the filter. When there is a hydrophilic pre-filter, filtration is excellent, so long as there is no surfactant present to emulsify the water. However, when surfactant is present, the hydrophilic filter allows passage of the water that is emulsified, which then goes through the second filter, since there has been no coalescence.

DESCRIPTION OF RELATED ART

U.S. Pat. No. 6,042,722 to Lenz teaches a single separator for removal of water by specific gravity from various fuels, including diesel and jet fuel.

U.S. Pat. No. 6,203,698 and U.S. Pat. No. 5,916,442 both to Goodrich teach the use of hydrophobic filter media to reject water from passage through the filter.

U.S. Pat. No. 5,993,675 to Hagerthy teaches the use of microfibers, which are impervious to the passage of water, but which allow the fuel to flow through.

U.S. Pat. No. RE37,165, U.S. Pat. No. 5,766,449 and U.S. Pat. No. 5,507,942 all to Davis all teach a single filter, which is hydrophobic so that it rejects water penetration.

Although some of these methods rely on a hydrophobic material to reject water, all of these methods utilize a single filter and none of them utilizes the hydrophobic filter to

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capture and coalesce surfactant-bound water. They function merely by rejection of normal size water droplets, and would be inadequate for rejection of emulsified water.

U.S. Pat. No. 4,988,445 to Fulk teaches the use of multiple spirally wound filters used in two stages. Fulk teaches a "means for enabling concentrate from said first stage module to pass directly to said second stage modules without passing through a pump; [a] means for forcing said feed stream through said first and second stages; and [a] means for recycling a portion of the concentrate from said second stage to said first stage."

U.S. Pat. No. 6,146,535 to Sutherland teaches the use of hollow microfibers for phase separation, by exclusion of the aqueous phase through pore size hydrophobicity.

Neither of these patents teaches the use of a hydrophobic first filter for the removal of surfactant-bound water through the use of the functional group properties of the surfactant, as is the case with the present invention.

Among other patents, several are of particular interest in evaluating the present invention:

There are "a number of devices that are able to remove suspended water from fuels. Among these are coalescing devices and electrostatic precipitators." "These coalescing devices become filled with water during operation and must be maintained carefully to prevent water from being pumped with the fuel to the point of use." (U.S. Pat. No. 4,814,087 to Taylor)

U.S. Pat. No. 4,372,847 to Lewis teaches the use of a cartridge for filtration that comprises a coalescing stage and a separating stage. This invention is specifically geared to separation of emulsified liquids. It functions through the formation of coalesced droplets that form due to a different specific gravity at the coalescing stage and remain free for removal at the second hydrophobic separating stage.

U.S. Pat. No. 4,814,087 to Taylor teaches a single stage cross-flow hydrophobic separator comprised of a microporous material. Cross-flow is used to clear the water from the separator.

U.S. Pat. No. 5,149,433 to Lien teaches the use of two spirally wound filters in series, whereby the second filter only functions for the removal of water from fuel if the first one fails. Cross-flow is used for the first filter to sweep away water as it accumulates.

U.S. Pat. No. 4,846,976 to Ford teaches a filtration system for a water-containing emulsion that is comprised of two stages, both comprised of hydrophobic microfilters. A back-wash accomplishes cleaning of the first microfilter. While this uses hydrophobic material, this invention serves to remove small quantities of emulsified oil and fat from the water, thus providing clean water for disposal, rather than removal of water from the hydrocarbons.

U.S. Pat. No. 5,443,724 to Williamson et al., teaches the use of two filters, the first being a coalescing unit and the second being a separating unit. Coalescence is accomplished by a choice of physical shape of packing material for a critical wetting surface energy "intermediate the critical wetting surface tension of the discontinuous and continuous phases".

The present invention differs from these examples of prior art in the following distinct ways:

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The principal function of the present invention is the removal of emulsified water from fuel. The present invention utilizes two stages of filtration to accomplish the goal of removal of water from fuel. Much of the prior art utilizes single stages that are less effective at removal and cannot remove emulsified water, as it would pass through their filters. Other two stage filtration systems also suffer from the inability to separate emulsified water from the fuel.

The present invention functions by providing a coalescing surface which is near the surface energy of the hydrophobic tail end of the surfactant molecule, whose head end is attached to a water molecule. Due to the attraction of the matching coalescing surface and the tail end of the surfactant, there is a build-up of bound water molecules to form and agglomerate, which agglomerate is then swept through by the jet fuel. Once in the flow between the first and second stages, the agglomerated water is swept away by the cross-flow.

The present invention differs from U.S. Pat. No. 4,846,976 to Ford, in that Ford essentially teaches the opposite. I.e., removal of small quantities of dispersed, surfactant-bound, fats and oils from water by hydrophobic filters. This would imply that to do the opposite, that is, to remove dispersed, surfactant-coated water, one would require hydrophilic filters (as is the case for conventional two-stage filters).

The present invention differs from U.S. Pat. No. 4,372,847 to Lewis, since Lewis utilizes specific gravity for the coalescing function.

The present invention differs from U.S. Pat. No. 4,814,087 to Taylor, in that Taylor uses a single stage hydrophobic filter and removes only dissolved water. Taylor does mention that coalescers may be used for removal of suspended water, but does not describe a method or apparatus for so doing.

The present invention differs from U.S. Pat. No. 5,443,724 to Williamson et al., in that Williamson et al. utilizes physical shape of the packing material for coalescence in the fashion of a baffle, and further that Williamson et al. specifies that the coalescer must allow wetting by the fuel, but not by the suspended water (discontinuous liquid phase). In the present invention, the coalescer is specifically hydrophobic to match the hydrophobic tail of the wetting agent, and its surface tension is thus near to or lower than that of the surfactant-bound water. Thus, the surface energy of the coalescing cartridge of the instant invention has no relationship to the surface tension of unbound water, but is specifically wet by the suspended water (discontinuous phase).

According to Williamson et al., the coalescing element must have a surface energy (or critical wetting surface tension) which is greater than the surface tension of the continuous liquid phase. In fact, Williamson et al. specifically requires that the surface energy be intermediate the continuous phase (fuel) and the discontinuous phase (water). Since jet fuel is approximately 23 mN/m and water is 72.5 mN/m, this would lead to practice of the art in Williamson et al. with a coalescer of approximately 48 mN/m, which is clearly much greater than for the hydrophobic materials of the present invention, which are typically around 30 mN/m or less.

In the instant invention, the coalescing element may have a surface energy lower than the surface tension of the

continuous phase, and is preferably as close as possible to the surface tension of the continuous phase. The surface tension of the discontinuous phase is wholly irrelevant, since it is bound with surfactant molecules, whose very function is to transform the discontinuous phase into a material having a surface tension that is very close to the continuous phase.

OBJECTS AND ADVANTAGES

The present invention offers significant objects and advantages over the above prior art devices and methods.

1. This invention provides a method and a device to remove water (up to 5%) in fuel and to obtain a clean output fuel with less than 5 ppm of water, while maintain a high flow rate not possible with the prior art.
2. Instead of coalescing water from fuel in between the first stage and the second stage as in a conventional fuel filter design, this invention uses a hydrophobic depth filter and a PTFE cross-flow membrane filter to separate and concentrate contaminated fuel. The concentrate goes to a settling chamber after the two filtration stages. Free water settles down in the chamber.
3. The coagulation filter cartridges and water separation filter cartridges may be installed in one filter housing with multiple chamber design.
4. The internal circulating pump design eliminates the need for a working tank, which is necessary for common cross-flow filter systems.
5. This invention solves the problem of inefficiently and ineffectively removing emulsified water from fuel with surfactant additives when using a conventional fuel-water separator.
6. This invention overcomes the common problem of the filter becoming dry and requiring change-out, when it is idle after use. This will occur where hydrophilic materials are used for the filter, as they will crack when they dry out. Synthetic fibers do not suffer this problem and are typically hydrophobic.

By reviewing and considering the drawings and descriptions further objects and advantages of the instant invention will be apparent.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The instant invention is a self-contained, multi-chambered two-stage filtration system, wherein there is both a water coagulation stage and a water separation stage. The first stage comprises a dead-end filter with hydrophobic media having a pore size range of 0.5 μm to 100 μm . The second stage comprises a cross-flow filter with a membrane that is hydrophobic, and which is typically made of polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE), with a pore size of approximately 0.1 μm .

Water coalescing takes place in the first stage and thus no coalescing needs to take place between the first and second stages, nor in the second stage.

An internal circulating pump is used to create cross-flow. The ratio of cross-flow to permeate flow is in the range of 1:1 to 1:30.

No working tank is required for the concentrate.

Flow takes place from the outside to the inside of the coagulation cartridge. The flow is parallel to the membrane surface of the separation cartridge.

There is a chamber for settling of water in retentate, and this has baffles to restrict and direct flow, and also to quiet the chamber to facilitate the settling of the water.

The system is capable of treating fuel with additives up to 5% water concentration.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWINGS

In the drawings which illustrate the embodiments presently contemplated for carrying out the present invention:

FIG. 1 depicts the spiral-wound enhanced filtration system in top sectional view and in cross sectional view.

FIG. 2A shows a cross sectional view of the membrane filter and its assembly into its non-perforated tube sleeve.

FIG. 2B shows a cross sectional view of the coagulation filter and its assembly into its perforated tube sleeve.

FIG. 3 illustrates the operation of the surfactant-bound water being attracted to the hydrophobic filter surface, forming globules and flowing out into the space between the first and second filters.

FIG. 4 is a cross sectional view of an alternative embodiment of the invention, in which the perforated tube is no longer required for the coagulation filter.

FIG. 5 shows by diagram another embodiment of the invention, in which the two filters are no longer in a common housing, but are now connected in series in individual housings.

REFERENCE NUMERALS IN DRAWINGS

2. Coagulation hydrophobic filter cartridge
4. Water separation hydrophobic membrane cartridge
5. Water separation cartridge housing
6. Filter housing
7. Coagulation cartridge housing
8. Top chamber
10. Feed chamber
12. Retentate chamber for water settling
14. Permeate chamber
16. Feed separation plate
18. Retentate plate
20. Permeate separation plate
22. Tube
24. Fresh feed inlet
26. Sight glass tube
28. Drain valve
30. Concentrate outlet
32. Circulation pump
34. Recirculation feed inlet
36. Outer baffle plate
38. Inner baffle plate
40. Horizontal plate
42. Clean fuel outlet
46. Cartridge exit
48. Ribs or tabs
50. Perforated tube sleeve
52. Non-perforated tube sleeve
54. O-rings or C-rings
55. Gasket
56. Removable cap
57. V shape seal ring
58. Feed
60. Center permeate tube
62. Concentrate flow

- 64. Small opening
- 65. Retentate bushing
- 70. Emulsified water molecule
- 72. Water molecule
- 74. Hydrophilic functional group (head)
- 76. Hydrophobic functional group (tail)
- 78. Filter surface
- 80. Water bound to filter surface
- 82. Coalescing water
- 84. Water agglomerate breaching surfactant coating
- 86. Large water globule
- 90. Retentate downspout
- 92. Ring support
- 94. Drain

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Preferred Embodiment

The coagulation filter cartridges 2 and water separation filter cartridges 4 are installed in a filter housing 6, in which four chambers (top 8, feed 10, retentate 12, and permeate 14) are formed using isolation plates, as shown in FIG. 1. Two groups of inner tube sleeves 50,52 (for the coagulation filters and water separation filters) are fixed between the feed separation plate 16 and the retentate plate 18 in the feed chamber 10, as shown in FIGS. 2A and 2B. The number of tube sleeves 50,52 in both of these groups can vary depending on the process rate. The feed separation plate 16 has openings corresponding to the tube sleeves 50,52. The coagulation cartridges 2 and membrane cartridges 4 are installed in their respective tube sleeves 50,52. The function of the tube sleeves 50,52 is to guide filter cartridge 2,4 installation and to direct flow in the housing 6. The tube sleeves of the coagulation cartridges 2 are perforated tubes 50, and the sleeves of membrane cartridges 4 are non-perforated tubes 52.

As seen in FIG. 2B, the coagulation cartridges 2, are attached with o-rings 54 and gaskets 55 at their ends, are inserted into the perforated tube sleeves 50, and sit on the retentate bushing 65. A removable cap 56, attached with an o-ring 54, is placed on the top of each cartridge. A compression force (e.g., using clamps or bolt) is applied on each cap 56 to compress the gaskets 55 at each end of the cartridge. The o-ring 54 on the cap 56 touches the inside wall of the opening on the feed separation plate 16. No fluid bypass is allowed due to the o-ring seals.

The water separation cartridge 4 (or membrane cartridge) shown in FIG. 2A is a spiral-wound design. Feed 58 enters the cartridge at one end. The permeate flow comes out from the center tube 60. The concentrate flow 62 (cross-flow, or bypass-flow) comes out at the other end of the cartridge. A V shape seal ring 57 sits in the seal groove of the end cap 56 located at the flow exit end of the cartridge. The V seal ring 57 is used to prevent flow bypass between the inner wall of the tube sleeve and the outer wall of the cartridge. Two o-rings 54 are attached to the outer wall of the permeate center tube 60 at the flow exit end 46 of the cartridge, preventing the bypass of unfiltered fluid to the permeate stream. The membrane cartridge 4 is inserted into the membrane tube sleeve 52 and sits on several ribs or tabs 48, which are welded onto the retentate bushing 65. The purpose of the tabs is to create flow passages for the concentrate flow. Several small openings 64 are placed near the tabs 48 to

drain the concentrate to the settling chamber 12 through the retentate bushing 65. The permeate center tube 60 is inserted into an opening on the retentate bushing 65. The two o-rings 54 on the center tube touch the inner wall of the opening. A tube 22 is attached to the opening at the other side of the retentate bushing 65 to direct the permeate flow to the permeate chamber 14.

In FIG. 1, the fresh feed inlet 24 is located at the middle of the feed chamber 10. Jet fuel with water is fed into the feed chamber 10. The feed passes through the perforated tube sleeves 50 and the coagulation cartridges 2, and flows out from the top of each coagulation cartridge 2. The filtrate from the coagulation cartridges 2 turns 180 degrees in the top chamber 8 and flows downward into the membrane cartridges 4 inside the non-perforated tube sleeves 52. The permeate from each membrane cartridge 4 is guided to the permeate chamber 14, and the concentrate drains into the settling chamber 12, in which a relatively quiet environment is maintained so that water droplets can settle down on the permeate separation plate 20. A sight glass tube 26 is mounted on the outside wall of the chamber to monitor the water level. Free water is drained through the drain valve 28.

The outlet for the concentrate 30 (located at the upper portion of the settling chamber) is attached to the suction port of the internal circulation pump 32. The discharge of the pump is connected to the recirculation feed inlet 34 through an appropriate one-way check valve (not shown). This pump 32 is used to generate extra flow as cross-flow or bypass-flow inside the membrane cartridges 4. The suction and discharge of the pump are attached to the filter housing 6 using quick disconnects so that the filter housing 6 and the pump 32 can be easily assembled and disassembled. In order to enhance the water settling efficiency, two parallel angled baffle plates 36,38 are vertically placed near the concentrate outlet 30 inside the settling chamber 12. The left and right sides of each baffle plate are welded on the inner wall of the filter housing. The upper end of the inner baffle plate 36 is attached to the retentate plate 18, and the lower end of the outer baffle plate 38 is welded on a horizontal plate 40, which is also welded to the inner wall of the filter housing 6. Concentrate from the membrane cartridges first flows downward into the settling chamber 12. Heavier water droplets stay at the lower portion of the settling chamber 12. The light liquid phase at the middle of the chamber turns 180 degrees and enters into the passage created by the two parallel angled baffle plates 36,38. At the end of the passage, the flow turns at least 90 degrees and exits from the concentrate outlet 30. The fluid from the concentrate outlet 30 is sent back to the feed chamber 10 using the internal circulation pump 32. Fresh feed is constantly fed into the feed chamber through the fresh feed port 24. The feed rate of the fresh feed is the same as the production rate (permeate rate).

Operation of the Preferred Embodiment

The fuel filter of the instant invention has one fresh feed inlet 24, located at the middle of the filter housing 6, and one clean fuel outlet 42, located at the bottom of the housing 6. The fresh feed inlet 24 is connected to a fuel storage tank (not shown), and the clean fuel outlet 42 is connected to the fuel supply tank of a fuel filling station (not shown) or to an engine. The internal circulating pump 32 continuously runs during the filtration operation. This pump can be a centrifu-

gal pump, or a gear pump, driven by an electric motor. Free water is drained through the drain valve 28. A sight glass tube 26 is mounted on the outside wall of the chamber to monitor the free water level. A pressure differential gauge (not shown) is used to monitor the pressure between the feed and the clean fuel.

In a hydrocarbon, such as jet fuel, which contains a surfactant, there will be present an emulsion of water in the fuel. This emulsified water is small enough to pass through both filters and will continue to contaminate the fuel unless it is removed. FIG. 3 depicts emulsified water molecules 70 dispersed throughout the fuel. In order to form the emulsion, each water molecule 72 has attached to it several molecules of surfactant. Each surfactant molecule has a hydrophilic functional group (head) 74 that attaches to the water molecule 72 and a hydrophobic functional group (tail) 76 that extends away from the water molecule 72 and which is solvated by the hydrocarbon jet fuel. As these emulsified water molecules 70 pass into the filter, they are attracted to the filter surface 78, binding to it as shown at 80. The hydrophobic tail 76 attaches to the filter surface and holds the water molecule 72 in place. As more emulsified water molecules gather, they group together and coalesce as shown at 82. Eventually, the surfactant coating is breached and the water molecules join together still attached to the surface of the filter as shown at 84. In time, the water globule becomes too large for the forces holding the hydrophobic tail to the surface of the filter, and they break away as shown at 86. As it passes out of the filter, the water is caught by the cross-flow of the jet fuel in the region between the first and second filter. Many of these agglomerations are carried away by the cross-flow of the fuel. Some however, are carried to the second filter, where because of their large size, they are unable to pass. The cross-flow then carries them away to the retentate settling chamber.

Because of the operation of the instant invention, it is possible to provide cleaned hydrocarbon fuel containing less than 5 ppm of water, even in the presence of surfactants. The initial water concentration can be as high as 5%.

In the case where there is no surfactant present in the jet fuel, the water will pass through the first filter and be rejected by the second filter in the normal fashion for a single stage filter.

Description—Additional Embodiment

FIG. 4 illustrates an alternative embodiment of the invention, in which the perforated tube sleeve 50 shown in FIG. 2B is no longer required for the coagulation filter 2 (filter shown in FIG. 1 only; removed from FIG. 4 for clarity). In the embodiment shown in FIG. 4, the coagulation filter 2 (filter shown in FIG. 1 only; removed from FIG. 4 for clarity) is seated inside a ring support 92, which serves as a guide. In order to allow drainage of fluid when the coagulation filter 2 (filter shown in FIG. 1 only; removed from FIG. 4 for clarity) is removed, a drain 94 is provided. An additional change has been added to this embodiment, wherein the inner baffle plate 36 from FIG. 1, has been replaced by a downspout 90. Other than the addition of a downspout 90, the second non-perforated tube sleeve 52 of the water separation hydrophobic membrane cartridge 4 (filter shown in FIG. 1 only; removed from FIG. 4 for clarity) remains unchanged.

Operation—Additional Embodiment

This alternative embodiment functions similarly to the preferred embodiment of FIG. 1, wherein feed solution flows into the first filter, which is the coagulation cartridge 2 (filter shown in FIG. 1 only; removed from FIG. 4 for clarity) and then passes to the second filter, which is the water separation hydrophobic membrane cartridge 4 (filter shown in FIG. 1 only; removed from FIG. 4 for clarity). However, instead of flowing into the coagulation filter 2 (filter shown in FIG. 1 only; removed from FIG. 4 for clarity) through a perforated tube sleeve 50, both as shown in FIG. 1, the feed fluid surrounds the coagulation cartridge 2 (filter shown in FIG. 1 only; removed from FIG. 4 for clarity) directly, and passes into it. Flow out of this first filter is the same as in the preferred embodiment of FIG. 1. Additionally in this alternative embodiment, shown in FIG. 4, fluid departing the second filter now passes out through a downspout 90, which functions in the same fashion as the inner baffle plate 36 depicted in FIG. 1, aiding in the settling down of water.

Description—Additional Embodiment

An additional embodiment is shown in FIG. 5. In this embodiment, the filter cartridges have been arranged in series in separate housings 5, 7. Coagulation filter 2 is enclosed in housing 7, with a fresh feed inlet 24 attached thereto. The water separation hydrophobic membrane cartridge is in housing 5. Connected thereto are the inlet from the first filter, a concentrate outlet 30, a circulation pump 32 and a recirculation feed inlet 34, with an appropriate one-way check valve (not shown). Prior to passing into the circulation pump 32, the concentrate passes into a retentate chamber for water settling 12, to which is attached a sight glass 26 and a drain valve 28. Additionally, there is a center permeate tube 60 followed by a clean fuel outlet 42 within this cartridge.

Operation—Additional Embodiment

In FIG. 5, coagulation cartridge 2 is enclosed in housing 7 and accepts the feed solution through the fresh feed inlet 24. Solution passes into the cartridge and flows out to the water separation hydrophobic membrane cartridge 4. Cross-flow is maintained within the housing 5, which contains the water separation hydrophobic membrane cartridge, and concentrate passes out through the concentrate outlet 30, to a retentate chamber for water settling 12, then through the circulation pump 32 where it returns to the coagulation cartridge 2 through the recirculation feed inlet 34. The permeate passes into the center permeate tube 60, where it departs the filtration system through the clean fuel outlet 42, which connects to an engine (not shown) or external fuel storage tank (not shown). Settled water level can be seen in the sight glass 26 and removed from the retentate chamber for water settling 12 by opening the drain valve 28.

Conclusions, Ramifications, and Scope

The present invention utilizes a novel concept of employing a hydrophobic first filter to capture and agglomerate water molecules that are bound into an emulsion through the action of the functional group properties of a surfactant. Prior art has used hydrophilic first filters to capture free water, but these will not function to agglomerate water when the water is emulsified into very small particles that are coated with surfactant.

While the invention has been described with reference to specific details and examples of the preferred embodiments,

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it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various changes may be made and equivalents may be substituted for elements thereof, without departing from the scope of the invention. In addition, many modifications may be made to adapt a particular situation or material to the teachings of this invention without departing from the essential scope thereof. Therefore, it is intended that the invention not be limited to the particular embodiments disclosed as the best mode contemplated for carrying out this invention, but that the invention will include all embodiments falling within the scope of the claims below and their legal equivalents.

We claim:

1. An apparatus for filtration of water from hydrocarbons comprised of

- a) a top chamber;
- b) a feed chamber;
- c) a chamber for water settling;
- d) a permeate chamber;
- e) a fresh-feed inlet, communicating with said feed chamber;
- f) a first dead end filter, having a filter medium that is hydrophobic, communicating on its inlet side with said feed chamber and on its outlet side with said top chamber;
- g) a perforated tube sleeve guide containing said first dead end filter;
- h) a second cross-flow filter, having a membrane that is hydrophobic, communicating on its inlet end with said top chamber and on its outlet end with a said chamber for water settling, which filter is further characterized by having a center tube for collection of permeate, communicating with said permeate chamber;

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- i) a non-perforated tube sleeve guide, containing said second cross-flow filter;
 - j) a common housing to contain both said first and second filters, including an elongate housing wall having opposed first and second open ends, an elongate cylindrical interior surface defining a housing cavity, and a series of plates extending across said open ends of said housing wall, defining said chambers;
 - k) a system for the recirculation of the retentate, including a port for outlet of the concentrate in fluid communication with said chamber for water settling, a circulation pump and a feed inlet having fluid communication with the feed chamber in the housing; and
 - l) an outlet for clean fuel permeate in fluid communication with said permeate chamber.
2. The apparatus for filtration of claim 1, further characterized by a ratio of cross-flow to fresh-feed in the range of 1:1 to 1:30.
3. The apparatus for filtration of claim 1, wherein the pressure differential between the feed pressure and the permeate pressure is less than or equal to 50 psi.
4. The apparatus for filtration of claim 1, wherein the operating temperature is maintained below or equal to 130 degrees Fahrenheit.
5. The apparatus for filtration of claim 1, wherein said first dead end filter has a pore size in the range of 0.5 μm to 100 μm .
6. The apparatus for filtration of claim 1, in which said second hydrophobic cross-flow filter is made from polytetrafluoroethylene membrane.
7. The apparatus for filtration of claim 6, wherein the polytetrafluoroethylene membrane is of 0.1 μm pore size.

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